

MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, January 15, 2008

9:15 AM

USDA NRCS Conference Room

Paul Dolan called the meeting to order at 9:15 am.

In attendance were:

Members –Harriet Powell, Southern District Representative; Paul Dolan, Northern District Representative; Gregg Cassidy, RIDEM Representative.

Advisors – Roylene Rides at the Door, USDA NRCS;

Others – Alicia Lehrer, Southern District; Gina DeMarco, Northern District; Kristen Dame, URI Cooperative Extension. Ramona LeBlanc, State Committee Administrative Assistant.

I. Minutes

Motion was made to accept the October 10, 2007 meeting minutes as amended: III. Reports; b. District/Advisors; 6. URI Cooperative Extension should have read- “A grant proposal is pending to extend a bobolink study being conducted in Jamestown throughout State. The project is interested in developing a market for farmers to “sell” environmental/conservation practices, primarily creating breeding

grounds for native birds. Also of concern is managing invasives in the grassland habitats. The researcher is primarily an economist, but he does have a strong concern for the environment.” Harriet/Gregg: unanimous.

II. Financial Report

Paul acknowledged receipt of the report and noted that 6 months into the fiscal year, spending is at 34% of budget although Directors’ Insurance will be due at the end of the year and represents a significant portion of the budget.

Motion to accept report. Harriet/Gregg: unanimous.

III. Reports

A. Chair’s Report: Chairperson not present.

B. Districts/Advisors Reports

1. ERICD: Not in attendance.

2. SRICD: See written report. Alicia noted that 2 staff members have been laid-off. Copies of a municipal staff training brochure developed by Southern District were distributed.

3. NRICD: See report e-mailed. An educational outreach assistant

position has been filled. Currently this position is part of the PWSB Watershed Education program but a grant has recently been approved by DEM that will fund a “Wetlands in My Backyard” program that may allow the new staffer to work more hours. This program is an educational outreach that will focus on prevention of encroachment, the positive impact of native species and negative impact of invasives. This is a one time grant funded by monies the DEM received from EPA. An additional grant has been received for a BMP Stormwater Treatment project in the village of North Scituate. The District hopes to use this as an opportunity to educate the community about stormwater issues and how they can alleviate the impact of stormwater.

4. RI DEM: Scott noted that with budget issues as they are, the department is on “maintenance mode” until more funding becomes available. A new round of 319 grants should be available late winter/early spring.

3. URI Cooperative Extension: Several Agricultural Extension Agent grant proposals have been funded through June of 2008. Other funding possibilities are also being pursued.

4. NRSC: See report e-mailed. An omnibus spending bill was passed by Congress that extends funding for some programs through March 15. There is a sense of urgency to get FRPP and WHIP monies obligated in the next 6 weeks. No new applications can be funded

and re-ranking is not allowed. \$1.8 million of \$2.8 million in EQIP funding has been obligated causing deficit within the RI office. The unspent money may be channeled to other state where funding has been exhausted. Funding for Pocasset was withdrawn with this bill.

A new Farm Bill was passed by the Senate in December and is currently in Joint Committee with staffers working on it during Congressional recess. It is possible that it will come to the floor for debate soon after Congress reconvenes.

In its current form there are payment limits of \$60000/year for EQIP and 66% of AGI must come from farming to qualify for EQIP. Further, the income limit would be lowered from \$2.5 million to \$1 million. There is an effort by many states to keep the payment qualifications as they are now or to eliminate them entirely.

Roylene is hoping that fish passage projects and the Pocasset project will be funded in the new Farm bill.

III. Old Business

A. RC &D Agreement for SE&SC Handbook: Connecticut is in process of updating their document and RC & D will use that as the basis of its own revision while adding chapters on coastal issues and bioremediation. The handbook is in process with hopes to have it completed soon.

B. CIG Program: Workshops are being held this week at each District

to help educate potential grant recipients and to aid them with the application process. A new agreement between NRCS and the State Committee will be prepared and signed.

C. Annual Report: Copies were distributed. The report is filed electronically with the State as required by law but no hard copies are sent to legislators.

D. Governor's Appointments to State Committee & FFOS: Those interested in serving on committee must register with Secretary of State and Governor can then appoint them. Since the process was started so long ago, it must be determined if those filings are still current or if they must be done again.

FFOS Subcommittee: Despite difficulty of having a quorum, a meeting must be attempted in order to get new recommended values for 2008. Ken Ayers will be contacted for possible meeting dates.

E. District Publicity: Southern District has availed itself of Chip Young's help

in publicizing its Annual Dinner and Art Show. Alicia is working on a grant proposal to RI Foundation for a publicity campaign to inform the public about the Conservation District and what they do.

Northern District will work with Michelle on publicity in Jeanne's absence.

IV. New Business

A. Separate Checking Account: A motion was made to open a separate checking account for SCC with Eric and Paul as signatories: Harriet/Gregg, unanimous.

B. 2008 Calendar: MSCC meetings will be held on 2/13, 4/9, 6/11, 8/13, 10/8 and 12/10.

C. RI League of Cities & Towns: To be held January 31 at the Crowne Plaza in Warwick. Registration fee was paid by RIACD.

D. Legislative Outreach: Harriet agreed to take over this role.

**E. State House Display: A motion was made to skip a State House display in 2008
and re-evaluate benefit in 2009: Harriet/Gregg, unanimous.**

V. Other

A. Eastern District – Alicia voiced extreme concern for Tom (and the Eastern District in general) and she wondered what support the State Committee could offer him. A particular board member at Eastern seems to be creating an atmosphere that is both hostile and counter-productive. The committee decided to pursue what options it has for the removal of district directors and to choose a course of action and implement it within 1-2 weeks.

B. RIACD- Jean has indicated she would like to step down from any role in the future.

As she is the only signatory on the checking account, it is necessary to add someone else quickly. Harriet will contact Jeanne and make necessary arrangements. Further, she will pursue insurance for the directors. With insurance, Norm Hammond would be willing to rejoin association and he would be a logical choice to add as signatory since NRICD keeps the financial records for the RIACD.

C. NRCS has funding available to support a committee that would serve to coordinate outreach by various partners in an effort to avoid duplication of work and to share databases. Stu Nunnery is working towards the establishment of such a committee with a view to who should serve on it.

Motion to adjourn at 10:45: Harriet/Gregg: unanimous.